

**PROGRAM
OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP
JULY 2008 – JUNE 2009**

I. INTRODUCTION

Poland is assuming the Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) for the period between July 2008 and June 2009. The Polish Presidency will take place in parallel to significant developments in the life of the European Union: conclusion of the terms of the European Parliament and the European Commission as well as the introduction of institutional changes envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty.

The Polish Presidency of the V4 will also coincide with anniversaries of events that are of great significance to Central Europe, the whole continent and the world. Late 2008 will see the 90th anniversary of the emergence of the new order in Europe after World War I, when Central Europe was particularly involved in a very dynamic process of establishing new independent states. The year 2009 will mark the 70th anniversary of World War II, followed by the continent's division by the Iron Curtain. Also next year, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet-styled regimes in Central Europe, spearheaded by Poland, and the beginning of the process of the continent's reintegration.

One could further mention the 10th anniversary of the accession of most V4 countries to NATO and the 5th anniversary of the V4 countries' membership of the EU. This period will be further highlighted by the EU Council Presidency of the Czech Republic, as the first V4 country, underlining the position of the Group member states in Europe.

That sequence of important anniversaries and events will define the year of the Polish Presidency of the V4. While building on the achievements of the Czech V4 Presidency and coordinating Group works with the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, we will focus on the problems of the region and the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Polish V4 Presidency will also offer an opportunity for undertakings (both symbolic and tangible) to emphasize the importance of cooperation in the V4 framework for its member states and attain practical advancement of that cooperation.

The Polish Presidency will be guided by the slogan of: *Solidarity in the region – together for democracy.*

II. GOALS OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY

II. 1. Goals related to the integration of internal activity of the V4

- Strengthening of the systemic character of V4 cooperation
- Development of the idea of the civil society through emphasis on the development of undertakings integrating local communities (strengthening of the role of territorial self-governments)
- Mutual promotion within the V4 framework
- Actions to deepen V4 cooperation in the area of sectoral policies
- Adjustment of the IVF rules with regard to the newly created so-called flexible projects.

II.2. Goals related to the coordination of activity of V4 states within the EU

- Strengthening of the V4 consultation mechanism at the EU political level
- Enhancement of the influence of V4 states with regard to decision-making in European institutions
- Joint promotional and lobbying actions of V4 states in Brussels and other EU states

II.3. Goals related to support for and cooperation with other states in Europe and the Caucasus

- Deepening of cooperation in the V4+ format with individual states (e.g. East European neighbours or Japan) and groups of countries (e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers, Baltic States or the Benelux)
- Greater engagement of V4 in the establishment and development of the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy
- Greater engagement of V4 in the negotiations on an enhanced cooperation agreement between the EU and Ukraine
- Promotion of European values and human rights (Belarus, GUAM countries)
- Promotion of reform process in the candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkan in order to support the region's course toward the EU. (Council conclusions of 10 December 2007) and NATO.

III. PRIORITIES OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY

Among the Polish priorities, pride of place will be given to the advancement of the ENP as an effective tool of promoting democracy, stability and reforms. Recognizing the importance of developing economic links, Poland will strive to **deepen economic, commercial and transports cooperation of V4 states with ENP countries.**

Poland will seek greater V4 commitment to the intensification of talks on a new, enhanced EU-Ukraine agreement, so that it can be given a partnership association character, offering the perspective of EU membership for Ukraine and qualitatively new institutional cooperation of the EU with Ukraine. The Polish Presidency will also promote a strong V4 support for the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, which will be a crucial component of the new EU-Ukraine agreement.

Recognizing the value of the experience acquired by Group countries in the process of building democracy and transforming their economic systems, the Polish Presidency will seek closer **coordination of assistance undertakings**, particularly those of a technical character, addressed to states in the V4 neighbourhood, i.e. Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Caucasus, as well as promote pre-accession preparations in the countries of the Western Balkans. Thus we will host in Warsaw in October 2008 a conference on assistance activities of V4 countries. This will enable us to exchange experiences in this field and to broadly discuss different means and forms of providing and implementing joint projects addressed to V4 neighbouring states, while taking into consideration a possible form of more institutionalised cooperation.

Appreciating the importance of **free movement of persons** for accelerating the process of democratisation of societies, on the basis of the achievements of the previous Presidencies, we support more people-to-people contacts, including the elaboration of a V4 position on visa policy, subsequently seeking support for that position among other EU partners.

Climate changes along with the development of modern technologies for energy conservation have become a great challenge for the societies of V4 countries. Within the framework of its presidency, Poland shall take actions aiming at meeting values of a “**Green Visegrad**”. Consequently, regular workshops for national experts dealing with environmental issues will be initiated in a V4 + Japan format. The Group will encourage similar format of cooperation with other countries.

The IVF is a recognisable instrument fostering Visegrad cooperation mechanisms. While maintaining continuity with the achievements of previous Presidencies, Poland will strive for improvement of the strategic grant system’s functioning and a better use of opportunities ensuing from the IVF scholarship programmes.

In this respect, we will collaborate with the International Visegrad Fund to initiate the promotion of **deeper social dialog and ties** between Group nations.

IV. PROPOSED UNDERTAKINGS

Ad. II.1 Goals related to the integration of internal activity of the V4

A close analysis of the momentum of contacts between V4 states, at various levels and in various spheres, points to the need for better time management and more accurate coordination. That is why Poland intends to continue measures launched by previous Presidencies for the purpose of making cooperation more transparent and systemic.

All initiatives at the local and regional level are crucial to the integration of V4 states. They not only offer a good platform for the exchange of experience, but also stimulate the process of building the civil society, in which every citizen has the possibility of direct involvement in public life. Appreciating the role of the VG Forum of Regions in this sphere, Poland will seek the Forum's opening to regions in ENP priority countries, among which we include Belarus and Ukraine.

Parliaments should occupy a special place in the Visegrad dialog. During its Presidency Poland will strive to upgrade inter-parliamentary cooperation, among others through the organization of meetings between the Speakers of the respective Parliaments and parliamentary committees.

Poland will seek better promotion of Group states within the V4, at the same time working to make citizens aware of the benefits ensuing from the involvement of the four states in the informal organisation. Efforts will be made to ensure that the International Visegrad Fund plays an increasingly prominent role in this sphere, through financing of projects on cultural exchanges, collaboration of academic centres and the activation of local communities.

V4 cooperation in the area of EU sectoral policies will be further deepened.

Ad. II.2 Goals related to the coordination of activity of V4 states within the EU

The year 2009 will be an exceptional period for the EU (probable entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, elections to the European Parliament, appointment of new European Commission), so V4 states face the challenge of conducting the related publicity campaigns. This is a good opportunity to share the experience in ways of encouraging citizens to take part in the European poll. Past experience shows that the elections are not preceded by genuine campaigns. Euro-elections tend to be dominated by domestic politics, pitting the government against the opposition. The deficit of democracy is an all-European

problem, but the last election to the European Parliament revealed that the lowest attendance occurred in our region (19.96% in Slovakia and 20.87% in Poland).

Exercising the V4 Presidency, Poland will take into account the priorities of the successive EU Presidencies (France, Czech Republic) to ensure the synergy of VG actions.

The Polish Presidency will seek coordination between Group states with regard to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty reforming the European Union. The establishment of new institutions enhancing the EU's internal cohesion and identity on the international scene, such as the post of permanent President of the European Council, a "consolidated" High Representative for CFSP with the future European External Action Service, open up before Visegrad partners new possibilities of promoting joint priorities in the EU's external relations, particularly with regard to transatlantic relations, relations with countries in Eastern Europe and development of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Polish Presidency will organise working meetings and consultations concerning the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, with special reference to the position of the European Commission and strengthening of the community method and the reform of the EU presidency system.

An improved consultation mechanism will give V4 countries the possibility of greater impact on decision-making within EU structures and institutions, thus enhancing those interests of the region that depend on Union policies.

The Polish Presidency will also focus on the works to update the European Security Strategy (also in closer cooperation of V4 with the French EU Presidency) and on the promotion of issues important to the V4 (e.g. consolidation and extension of the area of transatlantic cooperation, importance of the Eastern neighbourhood and the European perspective of, the Western Balkans) and EU security. In this respect Poland will make due provisions for the priorities of the Czech EU Presidency with regard to the ESDP.

Drawing on positive experiences in the area of energy security, experts will analyse external modalities, consult positions at the EU forum, discuss energy development priorities in the region, projects of connecting transmission grids and ways of ensuring security supplies. The experts will also consider the requirements that should be met by the new EU agreement with Russia.

The Polish Presidency will strive to elaborate a transparent mechanism for the exchange of support for V4 candidates to posts in Union institutions and other international organisations, and for conducting joint lobbying for various specific initiatives of the region's countries. The period of elections

demonstrates the need to support each others' candidates and to co-ordinate lobbying efforts.

The positive image of V4 states in Brussels and the other EU countries enhance the building of a deeper coalition of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland at the EU forum. Poland feels that that the existent infrastructure of VG cultural promotion is being insufficiently utilised for this purpose. Poland will initiate a discussion to address this problem.

***Ad.II.3* Goals related to support for and cooperation with other states in Europe and the Caucasus**

In line with the November 2007 Commission recommendations and the priorities of the Czech EU Presidency, the Polish Presidency intends to actively encourage V4 partners to increase their commitment to the establishment and development of the EU's eastern dimension. V4 states should devote much energy to upgrading the Union's eastward engagement, particularly in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and to promote enhanced cooperation and integration of our eastern neighbours with the EU. The partners should detail the mechanism of V4 support for priority countries.

The Polish Presidency will continue the efforts to tighten V4 cooperation in the sphere of diplomatic and consular assistance, the establishment of joint visa application centres and to elaborate a joint approach by V4 states to third countries regarding the broad domain of consular affairs (a meeting on the subject will be held in autumn 2008 or spring 2009).

Border guard/border police representatives from V4 states and FRONTEX (based in Warsaw) will take part in a seminar (hosted by Poland) to assess security in the region, in the context of the first experiences after the enlargement of the Schengen Area.

Poland will seek to advance cooperation in the V4+ format, using the instrument to support democratic transformations in ENP priority countries like Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and countries of the South Caucasus. The instrument will be also used to gain the support of partners for the optimum implementation of Group priority goals and maintenance of dialog with regional groupings and individual partners.

In line with the Council conclusions of 10 December 2007, which reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union, the V4 will

seek enhanced cooperation in advancing the accession process of the countries in the region.

Working contacts will be utilized to work out common positions on the policy of open doors towards Ukraine and Georgia, taking into account international security issues in relations with Russia and the countries of the Caucasus.

The Polish Presidency will strive to advance, together with Visegrad partners, the progress of reforms in Ukraine and Moldova, and will attentively follow developments in Belarus and the situation in Russia. Efforts will also continue to gain the support of non-VG partners for the joint implementation of assistance programs addressed to the societies of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, South Caucasus and – in line with the Commission's Communication on the Western Balkans of the 5th March 2008 - the Western Balkans, also applying the V4+ formula.

The Polish Presidency will work to build the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective for Ukraine, through:

- V4 support for association character of the new enhanced agreement between the EU and Ukraine, providing for the membership perspective and definition of a qualitatively new formula of consultations with Ukraine with regard to the operation of Union institutions and the participation of Ukraine in Community policies and EU programs;
- technical/consultative support of V4 states with regard to negotiations on the NEA, incl. the EU-Ukraine deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.
- support by V4 for Ukraine's aspirations to join the Energy Community;
- sharing with Ukraine experiences on the liberalisation of electricity and natural gas markets in EU countries, with particular reference to the experience of V4 states regarding the organisational, legal and ownership separation of production and distribution.

A separate place is allocated to the evaluation and coordination of the involvement of NATO, the EU and the OSCE in stabilisation missions in the Balkans. Following the suspension by Russia of its CFE membership and its possible geopolitical impact, it is necessary to analyse on the one hand the future of that accord by holding joint consultations in Vienna (OSCE) and on the other hand the future of NATO-Russia, Ukraine-Russia and Georgia-Russia relations in the light of a probable positive decision concerning the MAP invitation for Ukraine and Georgia.

The Presidency of the Czech Republic, the first Visegrad country in the EU, offers an excellent opportunity for a more robust promotion of the Group in Union space. It is also a convenient occasion for the promotion of Visegrad states as leaders of democratic transformations, in such countries as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, countries from the Western Balkans and the Caucasus. Consultations between the heads of cultural policy departments of VG countries will be devoted to that subject.

In 2000 Poland was the initiator of the Community of Democracies, a movement of states dedicated to the furtherance of human rights and democratic values. Recently, Warsaw was selected to host the Secretariat of the Community. The Polish Presidency will promote the work of the Secretariat and encourage its V4 partners to delegate their representatives to the incipient structure.

The highly-rated cooperation between the strategic planning departments of V4 foreign ministries will continue, with particular reference to the analysis of current international political developments.

V. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The implementation of Polish Presidency priorities will be served by a sequence of meetings at the top and expert levels.

- Presidents

- at least one meeting at Piestany (Slovakia), September 11-12 2008

- Prime Ministers

- at least two meetings: informal meeting and official summit in June 2009

- Speakers of Parliament

- at least one meeting

- Ministers of Foreign Affairs

- at least two meetings; May 2009 – meeting of Foreign Ministers on the occasion of the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Conference in Hanoi
- V4+ meeting with Georgia to discuss possible fields of cooperation in view of future MAP for Georgia emphasising V4's support for Georgian reform agenda and Euro-Atlantic ambitions.

- Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers responsible for EU affairs

- at least one meeting

- Heads of other ministries of V4 states, among which are already planned:
 - meeting of V4 environment ministers 17-18 September, Budapest
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs: meetings at the level of deputy ministers and EU political directors. October 2008: meeting of political directors VG+Japan. Other meetings depending on the current international situation

- experts' meetings devoted to specific issues, primarily at the level directors of departments dealing with EU affairs, security policy, planning and strategy (two meetings: autumn 2008 and spring 2009), eastern policy, consular affairs, public diplomacy (October/November 2008), development assistance (at margin of EU COASI, COEST, COLAT, COWEB, COAFR) and other depending on the current international situation.

- meetings of national VG coordinators
 - regular meetings every two months on a rotation basis, plus ad hoc meetings

Some of the meetings will be held in the V4+ format, with the participation of high representatives of Sweden, Ukraine, Israel, Japan, states of the Western Balkans, Baltic States and regional organisations – GUAM, CEFTA-2006, Benelux, and the Council of Nordic States.

VI. INTERMINISTERIAL COOPERATION OF V4 STATES

VI.1. Financial and economic issues

(responsible authorities: Ministry of Economy, Office of the Committee for European Integration, the Ministry of Finance in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development)

VI.1.1. EU budget and taxes

Principle aims of common actions will involve the strengthening of cooperation and its extension to new areas (accession to the euro zone, common tax base for legal persons). For this purpose, an experts' meeting to exchange views on the future of the EU budget will be organised (late 2008).

VI.1.2. Economic issues

With reference to the EU agenda, the Polish Presidency will organise meetings and consultations devoted to the following topics:

- package of initiatives designed to stimulate the development of small and medium-sized enterprises at the Community level – Small Business Act (after its presentation in July 2008);
- energy-climate package on ways of enhancing energy efficiency by the year 2020 (after September 2008);

- 3rd legislation package on energy;
- The project of the energy security package (including enhanced cooperation in the field of energy infrastructure integration in the European Union).

A meeting or consultations on the priorities of the Czech Presidency in the EU will also be organised in second half of 2008. Other planned consultations will deal with the liberalisation package, conceived to ensure effective operation of the internal natural gas and electricity markets. After November 2008, consultations will be organised concerning the Second Strategic Energy Review, with particular focus on energy security.

The Ministry of Economy is willing to organise an experts meeting on investment support and protection agreements.

In the framework of cooperation within the Article 133 Committee (Common Commercial Policy), Poland will organise consultations on the following issues: multilateral WTO trade negotiations, Russia's accession to the WTO and preparation of the future FTA negotiations, subject matter of the enhanced agreement with Ukraine, free-trade negotiations with Asian countries (Korea, India and ASEAN), talks on partnership and cooperation with China (including other trade issues with that country), discussions on strengthening of transatlantic economic relations, ITA and ACTA agreements and on bilateral trade issues of the respective EU member states.

VI.2. Regional development

(responsible authority: Ministry of Regional Development)

During the presidency period the MRD wishes to focus on events related to the following issues:

VI.2.1. Strategic programming

There will be an exchange of experience between V4 states on the drafting and implementation of long-term strategies of socioeconomic development and the functioning in those countries of strategic programming systems: legal framework, subjects, coordination, types of strategic documents and ways of elaborating them.

VI.2.2. Regional policy

- a. With reference to the future of regional policy – Program on the Future of European Regions (the future of the regions in the perspective of 2020 and 2050, in the global context)
- b. Institutional system of conducting regional policy, cooperation with the regions
- c. Legal basis, documents serving the realisation of regional policy, goals, principles and instruments,

- d. national spatial planning policy, its links to the regional planning (the spatial dimension within the regional policy)
- e. Modalities of implementing regional programs co-financed by the ERDF in the perspective of 2007-2013, in the fields of transport, environment protection, rural areas, revitalisation, housing,
- f. Decentralization: effects and problems arising from the accepted model of decentralization, compatibility of national and regional strategies of regional development with operational programs co-financed by the ERDF
- g. Statistics on the monitoring of regional development: adaptation of public statistics to the requirements ensuing from the implementation of structural funds and development programming for the next financial perspective, utilisation of various administrative sources to obtain data useful to development programs.

A Working Group of V4 Regional Development will devote its activity to issues mentioned in pts. (e)-(g).

VI.2.3 Issues regarding the implementation of operational programmes in the periods 2004-2006 and 2007-2013

Since the accounting period 2004-2006 is nearing conclusion, the Polish Presidency will organise consultations on closing the old-perspective programs. Experts will discuss the experience gained in the process of implementing the 2004-2006 perspective programs and problems states are encountering in the implementation of new programs. Experiences will be exchanged on decentralization of the use of Union funds, including the introduction of ICT technologies, also with reference to the obligations ensuing from Regulation EC 1083/2006 of July 11 2006.

The need to clarify issues connected with the wording of Article 61 (letter f) of the Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 of July 11 2006 laying down general provisions concerning the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund will also be raised. *"The certifying authority of an operational programme shall be responsible for keeping an account of amounts recoverable and of amounts withdrawn following cancellation of all or part of the contribution of an operation. Amounts recovered shall be repaid to the general budget of the EU prior to the closure of the operational programme by deducting them from the next statement of expenditure."* The ambiguities in it stem from the absence of a clear and unequivocal definition in Regulation 1083/2006 of the difference between the amounts subject to withdrawal after decommitment and amounts subject to the procedure of repayment.

VI.2.4. European territorial policy

Cooperation of Visegrad Group states in the framework of the INTERREG III Initiative and the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC):

- a. Ensuring synergy of undertakings financed out of different sources,
- b. Ensuring adequate support for strategic projects initiated by Group partners in the framework of the Central Europe Program and programs in the framework of INTERREG IV C."
- c. Exchange of experience on the realisation of trans-frontier, supranational and international programs in the framework of the ETC.

Furthermore:

- Development of the research potential of Group States: ESPON, cities in URBACT;
- Exchange of experiences about implementation regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) in the V4 states.

VI.2.5 Cohesion policy after 2013

The discussions within V4 will concentrate on:

- a. Value added of cohesion policy and its contribution to the implementation of the European project;
- b. Question of integrated approach to cohesion policy and EU sectoral policies. Definition of the relationship between Community policies, with reference to the respective instruments and rules of implementation;
- c. "Public goods" and cohesion policy:
 - how should "European public goods" be defined?
 - which "European public goods" should be ensured by cohesion policy instruments and which by other EU policies?
- d. Indicators: what new indicators might be applied to gauge development and qualify regions for support?
- e. Analysis of potential solutions to boost the effectiveness of cohesion policy instruments;
- f. Implementation of Lisbon Strategy goals by means of cohesion policy, coordination mechanisms in Group states.
- g. Effectiveness of support rural areas delivered in the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy – implications for the future design of these policies
- h. Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment and ETC objectives: should it they be preserved as it is, or modified and, if so, in which direction?
- i. New challenges identified by the European Commission in the Fifth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion. New challenges for Cohesion Policy implementation mechanisms (e.g. simplification measures, mono-fund approach, integrated approach, etc.);
- j. Territorial cohesion as a new dimension of the cohesion policy:
 - how to define territorial cohesion, what are the consequences of including the spatial dimension for the future of cohesion policy;

- cooperation in the framework of works on the First Action Program for the implementation of the EU's Territorial Agenda, implications of the inclusion of "territorial cohesion" in the Lisbon Treaty, discussion on the outlines of the "Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU" document.

The preliminary agenda of all events organised by the MRD provides a.o. for an working meeting with V4 representatives from MRDs (July 2008) to discuss the agenda of the Polish presidency programme.

At the end of September, the first of two meetings at ministerial level will be convened with a possible V4+ format with RD ministers from Bulgaria and Romania. It will be centred around issues regarding strategic programming, the future of cohesion policy and regional policy. Also during September there will be organised experts workshops for which the agenda shall be established at the experts meeting in Warsaw in July.

VI.3. Internal affairs and administration

(responsible authority: Ministry of Interior and Administration)

An annual working meeting of Vice Ministers and Secretaries of State responsible for public administration in V4 countries will be convened to sum up past cooperation and set new goals for future.

The Polish Presidency will focus on the following undertakings:

VI.3.1. Police cooperation

- conference of police negotiators and psychologists (first half of 2009);
- experts' meeting devoted to the exchange of information on the securing of mass events;
- trends in the amendment of regulations on the security of mass events, types of legal acts that are applied;
- exchange of experience on police cooperation in the border regions regarding the enlargement of Schengen Area.

VI.3.2. Border guard cooperation

- experts' meeting devoted to readmission, in collaboration with Ukraine (first half of 2009);
- experts' meeting on the development of the information exchange system (VGS II) – (October/November 2008);
- border guard/border police representatives from VG states and FRONTEX seminar (hosted by Poland) to assess security in the region in the context of the first experiences after the enlargement of the Schengen Area (first half of 2009);

- possible organisation of a joint operation on internal borders to deal with previously identified common threat (2009).

VI.3.3. Systemic solutions

- discussion on systemic changes, i.e. incorporation of the border guard into the Police in the Czech Republic and Hungary;
- exchange of experience concerning the role of ministries of internal affairs in the supervision of services, including the scope of competencies and division of responsibilities.

VI.3.4. Migration

- Political discussions on strengthening the Eastern dimension of EU's Global Approach to Migration, possible consultation with the Eastern ENP countries and FR PRES in V4+ format;
- Expert-level discussions on the developments of the EU's migration policy and the projects in the Eastern ENP countries (migration missions, cooperation platforms, mobility partnerships, elaboration of new Action Oriented Papers (AOP)) – identifying the possible target countries, the common goals and actions;
- Close cooperation as regards the project called “Building Migration Partnerships”. Exchange of views in the course of the preparation as well as during the follow-up of the kick-off meeting of the project which is planned to be held in May 2009 under the auspices of the Czech EU Presidency;

Exchange of experience on the implementation of bilateral local border traffic agreements.

VI.3.5. Crisis management

- cooperation in implementing the respective elements of the Civil Protection Community Mechanism at the EU level;
- joint training of civilian experts from VG countries for the needs of EU crisis management, with special note to the financial aspects of these undertakings;
- use of the Civil Protection Financial Mechanism for the implementation of joint projects in the sphere of prevention and preparedness for extraordinary occurrences;
- exchange of information concerning structural changes in national civil protection systems of the V4 states (both instituted and planned).

VI.3.6. ICT technologies

- EU strategy for the development of the information society after 2010: debate on the priorities of V4 states, elaboration of postulates to be submitted to the European Commission at the forum of the High Level Group i2010 coordinating the implementation of the current strategy (2010 – a European Information

- Society for growth and development) and/or the EU Competitiveness Council - up to 3 working meetings during the Presidency (Heads of Department level), 1 summarising meeting of Group representatives to the HLG 2010;
- financing of ICT and information society in the framework of structural funds and Community programmes (e.g. Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme): possibilities of cooperation with the use of trans-border cooperation instruments and international partnerships for undertakings in support of the application of new technologies in the collaboration between entrepreneurs – 2 workshops;
 - exchange of experience in implementing e-administration, e-integration, e-education – 2 workshops/meetings/study visits;
 - cooperation with Ukraine in the ICT area.

VI. 4. Justice

(responsible authority: Ministry of Justice)

A meeting of VG Justice Ministers will be held in spring of 2009 serving the exchange of views and experiences about issues that ministries of justice must cope with nowadays (model of the legal career; relationship between bilateral agreements concluded by Visegrad Group states and the 1980 Rome Convention on the law applicable to contractual obligations; e-justice; submitting the joint projects to the European Commission within the framework of the EU Criminal Justice Programme and the Civil Justice Programme.)

VI.5. Transport and logistics

(responsible authority: Ministry of Infrastructure)

The Polish Presidency will focus on undertakings designed to strengthen cooperation and work out common positions of the V4 states by organising one or two meetings of working groups in the following areas:

- rail transport,
- combined transport,
- road tolls,
- traffic safety,
- transports and international terminals,
- pan-European transports corridors,
- revision of recommendations and priorities of TEN-T.

Poland will also strive for a common V4 position concerning access to the market of freight road haulage, the conditions of access to the EU market by road haulage companies and the rules on bus and coach transportation. One coordinating meeting at the level of Directors of International Cooperation

Departments will be organised in 2008. VG Transport Ministers will meet in spring 2009. The ministers will hold informal consultations prior to the EU summit with their participation.

VI.6. Environment protection

(responsible authority: Ministry of Environment)

V4 Ministers dealing with environmental protection will meet on 17-18 September 2008 in Budapest.

The Polish Presidency will focus on the following issues:

VI.6.1. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

Poland will promote exchanges of information on the preparation of positions concerning the energy and climate package, and will strive to elaborate a strategy for the attainment of positive results at the COP14/CMP4 in Poznan. We will facilitate the exchange of experience concerning the sale of surplus units of allocated emissions (AAU) and the linkage of these transactions with emission reduction projects – Green Investments System and with collaboration on environmental technology transfers, on a sound financial basis.

VI.6.2. Strategy of sustainable development

The Polish Presidency will promote the exchange of experience concerning the elaboration of the VG states' renewed strategy of sustainable development and its implementation.

VI.6.3. Continuation of the “Environment for Europe” Process

The Polish Presidency will strive for the elaboration of joint VG initiatives and implementation of undertakings in the framework of the “Environment for Europe” Process launched in Belgrade. Particular emphasis should be placed on efforts towards a reform plan of this process to be successfully adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at its 2009 Spring Session.

VI.6.4. Air pollution control

The Polish Presidency is preparing for the exchange of experience concerning:

- a. renewable energy sources (legal regulations, technologies);
- b. enforcement of air pollution regulations (air pollution assessment in zones; air protection programs, emission reduction);
- c. trans-frontier transfer of pollution;
- d. cooperation and exchange of information about the sources of air pollution.

VI.6.5. Nature protection

Monitoring of habitats and species under the Natura 2000 Network and/or determination of the state of protection of areas covered by Natura 2000. Cooperation of national parks will be launched, with a meeting on park management in the national systems of protected areas.

Collaboration will be upgraded with regard to the elaboration of strategies for dealing with invasive foreign species in border regions and to discuss the possibility of cooperation regarding the delivery of hunting permits for large predatory mammals protected in Poland (wolf, lynx, brown bear), which often migrate within the border areas of Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The problem of poaching shall also be addressed in the frame of a closer V4 cooperation.

VI.6.6. Forestry

Follow up of the V4 cooperation within the framework of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

Cooperation in the preparatory process of the Protocol on the conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity to Framework Convention on the Protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians and the Protocol on sustainable forestry management.

Poland will support the exchange of knowledge and information between authorized national institutions about potential threat of forests caused by harmful factors in the border regions and also solution of emergency situations in the forests according to the requirements of nature protection.

VI.6.7. Cooperation between Nature Protection Inspectorates

Poland will focus on the exchange of experience regarding the implementation of Regulation (EC) 166/2006 of the European Parliament and Council of January 18 2006 on the establishment of a European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, in the form of the first report concerning the Register, which member states are obliged to submit to the European Commission by June 30 2009. Cooperation will also deal with ways of ensuring by the competent authorities in the member states that facility managers provide quality data.

VI.7. Labour and social policy

(responsible authority: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy)

The Polish Presidency will focus on:

- the role of social partners in shaping and implementing European policies (including utilisation of EU funds);
- comparison of the organisational and legal systems of support for NGOs.

Another topic of interest will be the trans-frontier provision of services by companies from the European Economic area and third countries. A seminar will be held on ways of monitoring the scale of the phenomenon and practical protection of the rights of workers delegated (first quarter of 2009).

VI.8. Culture

(responsible authority: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage)

The Polish Presidency will focus on:

- activity of the working group on the protection of the cultural heritage in conditions of the market economy;
- publication of the Visegrad Library series;
- exchange of experience on ICT technologies in scientific and library work;
- continuation of cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund
- deepening of cooperation on the utilisation of EU funds in the cultural sector;
- unification of statistical data.

Prominence will be given to debate on current cultural issues at the EU forum (in particular: economic aspects of culture and dialog between cultures).

The Presidency will organise in Poland a meeting of V4 ministers and experts and two experts' meetings on the protection of the cultural heritage in conditions of the market economy (Kraków); a conference on the utilisation of EU funds in the cultural sphere will be held in Hungary (first half of 2009).

VI.9. Sports and tourism

(responsible authority: Ministry of Sport and Tourism)

In connection with the ongoing preparation of the Plan for Sport, which will constitute the basis of European Commission's works after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the Polish Presidency will seek the elaboration of joint, regional undertakings enhancing the position of the Group in the European Union (experts' meeting).

All tourism promotion undertakings will follow the motto of the *European Quartet – One Melody*. The Polish presidency will ensure continuity in all tourism-related projects and make all necessary efforts to implement the goals set by the Cooperation Protocol signed in Prague in March 2008. Recognising the excellent results of the joint promotional undertakings of the V4 in non-European markets, Poland will strive for the implementation of the Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism. A seminar will be held to allow an exchange of the relevant experience, along with two working sessions of V4 national tourism organisations (first quarter of 2009).

In the autumn and December 2008, the Polish Presidency will organise working meetings of ministers responsible for tourism.

VI. 10. Education

(responsible authority: Ministry of National Education)

During its presidency, Poland will ensure among schools and non-governmental institutions the promotion of all IVF programs and initiatives, enabling the realisation of co-financed projects (Small Grants and Standard Grants) in international cooperation and youth exchanges, especially within the V4 member states.

VI. 11. Higher education

(responsible authority: Ministry of Higher Education)

The Polish Presidency will pursue the promotion of the opportunities offered by the International Visegrad Fund in the form of the scholarship fund and support for academic studies about the Visegrad states.

VI.12. Agricultural policy

(responsible authority: Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance)

The Polish Presidency will organise at least two meetings in Poland, in autumn 2008 and spring 2009, at the level of Agriculture Ministers. The meetings will be devoted to a review (“health check”) of the Common Agricultural Policy, the shape of the CAP after 2013, and agricultural negotiations at the WTO. Poland will seek to discuss a possible joint V4 position, to be presented at meetings of the EU Agriculture Council.

VI.13. Defence policy

(responsible authority: Ministry of National Defence)

At least one meeting, each, of Defence Ministers and chiefs of staff.

Pursuant to the decision of the Defence Ministers taken in Warsaw on March 4 2005, meetings will be held at the level of Defence Policy Directors Affairs and National Armaments Directors to draft a joint V4 position, to be presented at Defence Ministers meetings in the framework of NATO and the EU, and relating to works in the framework of the European Defence Agency.

Poland will seek further coordination of V4 countries in the sphere of military – technological cooperation including the creation of a common EU Battle Group and participation in advisory/expert missions.

The Polish Presidency will continue efforts designed to build the Euroatlantic perspective for Ukraine and Georgia, through:

- transfer to Ukraine and Georgia by V4 states of their experiences on accession to NATO and the EU;
- coordination of the input of V4 states to the allied debate on granting the MAP to Ukraine and Georgia;
- professional support for the development of strategic defence policy demands.